
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

WAC

Writing Across the Curriculum

Teach. Write. Teach Writing.

WRITING-TO-LEARN

STRATEGIES FOR HELPING STUDENTS
BECOME BETTER WRITERS
ACROSS DISCIPLINES

Bryna Siegel Finer, PhD
Director, Writing Across the Curriculum
brynasf@iup.edu

Teach. Write. Teach Writing.

WHAT IS WRITING TO LEARN?

- “writing is not only a way of showing what one has learned but is itself a mode of learning” (McLeod 2).
- “write-to-learn assignments...[are] aimed at helping students think on paper” (3).
- “writing-to-learn [is] a ‘knowledge-transforming’ rather than a ‘knowledge telling’ task” (3)

From Susan McLeod, *Writing Across the Curriculum: A Guide to Developing Programs*

WHY “WRITE TO LEARN”?

- lack of communication skills exhibited by college graduates
- a third of all workers do not meet employer’s expectations in written communication
 - “writing time [should] be doubled at the university level”
 - “a clear call for professors in every discipline to take a more vested interest in writing in their classrooms.”
- “writing clearly and forcefully,” “systematizing and organizing data,” “doing research,” “taking notes,” and “creative thinking.”
 - better writing skills will make our graduates more competitive in the workforce
- enhances IUP’s reputation and can potentially lead to an increase in enrollment and retention

PRINCIPLES OF WRITING-TO-LEARN

- Often ungraded (but still checked)
 - Low stakes
 - Often for students' eyes only
- Makes knowledge personal (encourages students to make connections to their own experiences or to explore the content in their own way without judgment)
 - Encourages muscle-memory
- Shows that you, the teacher, value writing as a skill in your discipline

STRATEGY 1: JOURNALING/BLOGGING

- Directed
 - Free
- Provide a list of prompts to choose from or a list of ideas for journaling and clear guidelines for what “counts” as a journal entry
 - Check journals on occasion (a few students at a time) – your choice whether to grade or simply check off that it’s done

STRATEGY 2: FREEWRITING

- Pen-to-paper, consistent movement
 - Directed (with a prompt)
 - Completely free
- Sporadically throughout a class session or at various times throughout the semester
- Introducing class or debriefing at end of class

STRATEGY 3: READING RESPONSES

- Usually short (one page) personal response to a reading assignment
 - Directed or free
- Evaluating for exploration, not mastery of content
 - Sporadically throughout the semester
 - Share with peers

STRATEGY 4: ONLINE DISCUSSION THREADS

- D2L, Moodle, or other CMS
 - Post a prompt for them to respond to
 - Graded holistically based on participation
 - Easy to check/keep track of
- Doesn't take up class time (and can enhance class conversation)

STRATEGY 5: SOCIAL MEDIA

- Class Facebook page with required posting (post prompts for discussion)
 - Class Twitter hashtag
 - Class blog or Tumblr page
- Doesn't take up class time (and can enhance class conversation)

STRATEGY 6: DOUBLE-ENTRY JOURNAL

- What the text says / What I think about the text

Direct Observation	Interpretations of Observations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Last week I drove up the hill to the guard tower, identified myself and my affiliation, and was told to “park to the left” by a disembodied voice coming from a loudspeaker.”• “After going through many metal security doors, being checked by a metal detector that even picks up the nails in your shoes, and being escorted by numerous guards, I finally got to be with the people I had come to see.”• “For example, one young lifer named Ken became interested in Japanese paper folding – origami... A few weeks later, I saw origami creations everywhere – flowers, dragons, and birds – all made by the guys and all done carefully and beautifully.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The narrator of the story is trying to find a human element to the life-sentence prison of Monroe State Penitentiary.• The check-in procedure she must endure shows her commitment to spending time with these men and seeing them as human beings. These details also show the enclosed and constrictive security prison.• These details show the prison mates as human beings that are sensitive and creative rather than the typical depiction of prison mates. It also serves as a specific example in the body that supports the thesis.

STRATEGY 7: LECTURE RESPONSE

- This is what you're doing now!
 - Engagement with the lecture
 - Encourages direct response
- Helps facilitate class discussion while also encouraging writing practice

REFERENCES

Susan McLeod, *Writing Across the Curriculum: A Guide to Developing Programs*

Anne Herrington, "Writing to Learn: Writing Across the Disciplines."

Klein, Peter. "MBA Recruiters' #1 Pet Peeve: Poor Writing and Speaking Skills."
Organizations and Markets. 2009.

Eatherington, Mel. "Employees Lack Writing Skills in the Workplace."
Western Carolina University. 2004.

Hyman, Jeremy and Lynn Jacobs. "11 Skills You'll Need for a Career."
US News and World Report. 2009.